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Hint Dead JFK Witness Was in CIA

Palm Beach, Fla. (Combined Dispatches) — A man who apparently committed suicide when he learned that his testimony was wanted concerning President Kennedy's assassination was once a CIA operative and claimed to be a confidant of Lee Harvey Oswald, sources said yesterday.

The body of the man, George de Mohrenschildt, 65, a Russian-born French teacher, was found Tuesday afternoon in a study at the waterfront mansion of Mrs. Charles Tilton 3d. He had been a guest of Mrs. Tilton, as was his 33-year-old daughter, who found the body after returning from a shopping trip.

De Mohrenschildt apparently committed suicide, using a shotgun, after learning that Gaeton Fonzi, an investigator for the House Assassinations Committee, was seeking him to testify before the panel about his connections with Oswald, who was Kennedy's sole

assassin, according to Warren Commission findings.

A source who had investigated the assassination of Kennedy for three years told United Press International that de Mohrenschildt had served as a CIA agent in Haiti in 1963, the year of Kennedy's death.

De Mohrenschildt, who held degrees in international commerce, petroleum geology and engineering, had denied in lengthy testimony before the Warren Commission that he had ever been an agent of any government. He had said that his wide travels on several continents were strictly related to private

business. However, the Warren Commission also took off the record testimony from de Mohrenschildt that has never been made public.

The Palm Beach County sheriff's office withheld an official ruling on de Mohrenschildt's death, pending results of an autopsy. But Lt. Richard Sheets said there was "no reason to suspect anything other than suicide."

In Washington, Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.), a committee member who was headed the Kennedy assassination inquiry, said yesterday that de Mohrenschildt, a professor of French at Bishop College in Dallas, was considered "a crucial witness" in the committee's investigation. Preyer told reporters that the committee would make an effort to subpoena any papers in de Mohrenschildt's Beach mansion where he died.

But a few hours after Preyer's statement, Rep. Eldon Rudd (R-Ariz.), in a House speech, attacked de Mohrenschildt's credibility, noting that the Russian emigre had spent almost two months in the psychiatric wing of Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas last winter, and had talked about his involvement with Oswald, to a Dutch reporter after leaving the hospital.

Preyer, a former judge, said that he was aware of de Mohrenschildt's history of mental illness, but that nevertheless the professor had made some direct contact with Oswald before the assassination. The committee learned of de Mohrenschildt's supposedly new information after a story appeared recently in the Dallas Morning News.

In 1964, the Warren Commission investigated de Mohrenschildt, a supposed descendant of Russian nobility, because he had known Oswald in Dallas. But the commission concluded that de Mohrenschildt had known nothing about the No. 2, 29163, lay lying of Kennedy.

However, de Mohrenschildt told the Butch reporter recently that he might have been "responsible" for Oswald's behavior before the assassination. De Mohrenschildt said that he had had advance knowledge of the murder but gave no specifics.

The Warren Commission said that de Mohrenschildt had left the Soviet Union in 19, later receiving a degree from the University of Texas in petroleum geology.

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Professor, 65, Who Killed Himself May Have Been Oswald Confidant

PALM BEACH, Fla., March 30 (UPI)—A Russian-born professor who committed suicide, apparently when he learned that a House investigating committee wanted his testimony concerning President Kennedy's assassination, may once have been an operative for the Central Intelligence Agency, and a confidant of Lee Harvey Oswald, sources familiar with the case said today.

The body of George de Mohrenschildt, 65 years old, was found yesterday in a second-floor study of a Palm Beach waterfront mansion by his daughter, Alexandra, 33, who had just returned from a shopping trip.

His death came shortly after he learned that an investigator for the House assassinations committee was seeking him to testify before the committee about his connections with Mr. Oswald, Mr. Kennedy's assassin.

The timing of Mr. de Mohrenschildt's death immediately became a factor in the House committee's request to extend its investigations of political assassinations. Representative Richardson Preyer, Democrat of North Carolina, said the committee had linked Mr. de Mohrenschildt to "new evidence" that indicated "de Mohrenschildt may have been closer to Lee Harvey Oswald than appeared on the surface."

Called C.I.A. Agent

A source who investigated the Kennedy assassination for three years asserted that Mr. de Mohrenschildt, who held degrees in international commerce, petroleum geology and engineering, was serving as a C.I.A. agent in Haiti in 1963, the year that Mr. Kennedy was killed in Dallas.

Mr. de Mohrenschildt denied in published testimony before the Federal commission that investigated the Kennedy death that he had never been an agent of any government, he said his wide

travels on several continents were solely business-connected. However, the commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, also took off-the-record testimony from him that has never been made public.

Mr. de Mohrenschildt talked last month in Dallas with a Dutch journalist, Wilhelm Oltmans, who told the House Assassination committee that in advance that Oswald was going to do.

According to the Warren Commission report, published in October 1964, Mr. de Mohrenschildt and his wife met Oswald and his wife Marina in Dallas in 1962.

Mr. Preyer said Mr. de Mohrenschildt "was a crucial witness for us, based on the new information he had." "He was intimately involved with Oswald," he added.

Convinced of Suicide

The Palm Beach County sheriff's office withheld an official ruling on Mr. de Mohrenschildt's death until results of an autopsy and further investigation were made public. But Lieut. Richard Sheets said there was "no reason to suspect anything other than suicide."

Mr. de Mohrenschildt, who was a French-language teacher at Bishop College in Dallas at the time of his death, arrived from Brussels a week ago with his daughter to visit Mrs. Charles Tilton 3d.

Mrs. Tilton owns the three-story home on an estate alongside the Intracoastal Waterway, seven miles south of Palm Beach. Mrs. Tilton is the former Nancy Pierson Sands.

Sheriff Richard Wille said that Gaeton J. Fonzi, an investigator for the House assassinations committee, went to the Tilton estate about noon yesterday and left word that he would return at 8:30 P.M. to see Mr. de Mohrenschildt. The sheriff said no suicide note had been found.

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Was He Responsible for Oswald's Act?

The de Mohrenschildt-JFK Enigma

By Jeremiah O'Leary
Washington Star Staff Writer

When George de Mohrenschildt disappeared in Brussels last March 7, he could have been tabbed either as just another fruitcake or someone out to make a buck on his acquaintance with Lee and Marina Oswald.

Or, just possibly, he could have been the man responsible for Oswald's behavior when President John F. Kennedy was shot to death in 1963 as he reportedly acknowledged in the manuscript of a book he had written.

But today, this much is certain about the 65-year-old Russian-born emigre:

- He is now in a Palm Beach, Fla., morgue, dead of an apparently self-inflicted shotgun wound.
- He was of sufficient interest to the House Committee on Assassinations that one of its investigators was in Palm Beach on Tuesday seeking to interview him when the ostensible suicide occurred.
- He is once again of considerable interest to the FBI, which devoted a major portion of Book 9 of the Warren Commission Report to de Mohrenschildt.

If de Mohrenschildt had a motive for committing suicide in his daughter's house, it is not known. Nor is it known why he was negotiating with Dutch publishers to sell his book about the Kennedy case when he disappeared in the Belgian capital shortly after meeting a Soviet diplomat.

He has been categorized as either an opportunist or as a man with a history of mental illness who was subject to wild changes of mood. But he cannot be ignored so long as the House investigative panel and the FBI are genuinely interested in finding out what role, if any, de Mohrenschildt played in the killing of President Kennedy in a Dallas motorcade on Nov. 22, 1963.

IT HAS LONG BEEN known that de Mohrenschildt, as part of the Dallas Russian-speaking community, was close to Lee Harvey Oswald and his Russian wife, Marina. The FBI says it checked him out every way from Sunday in the days and weeks after the presidential assassination. He was a witness before the Warren Commission, and what he said then can be found in 118 pages of that bulky report.

What is not known is what his motive was for writing the manuscript of a book entitled "I'm a Patsy, I'm a Patsy" and claiming that it is the story of how he was responsible for Oswald's assassination of Kennedy.

The mysterious recent history of de Mohrenschildt is largely attributa-

ble to a Dutch journalist named Willem Oltmans, who was interviewed by The Washington Star on March 18. Oltmans, who had been cultivating de Mohrenschildt as a news source and a friend for the past 10 years, is the man who told the House Assassinations Committee earlier this month about de Mohrenschildt's decision to tell his version of the Kennedy murder.

It was this appearance before committee staffers by Oltmans on March 11 that prompted the panel to send investigator Gaetan Fonzi to Palm Beach last Monday to try to question de Mohrenschildt. According to Oltmans, this is the erratic story of the White Russian college professor's last weeks of life:

Oltmans had known de Mohrenschildt for a decade in periodic visits to Dallas. He knew de Mohrenschildt to be an emigre Russian count, a petroleum engineer, a teacher of French at Bishop College and as a close friend of the Oswalds. Oltmans fell into the habit of visiting George and Jeanne de Mohrenschildt two or three times a year.

IN JANUARY 1976, de Mohrenschildt wrote Oltmans that he was preparing a book and sent several pages to the Dutch reporter for consideration. By June the book was completed, but Jeanne de Mohrenschildt told Oltmans she was upset when she read it. She told her husband he would go to jail if it was published because it was about the assassination of Kennedy and mentioned names of CIA and FBI agents throughout.

Last November, Oltmans went to Dallas and called de Mohrenschildt, only to be told by his wife that he had been in a hospital for several months. Oltmans said he called de Mohrenschildt's lawyer, Pat S. Russell, and was told de Mohrenschildt was in a mental hospital suffering from a persecution complex and undergoing heavy shock treatments.

According to Oltmans, the manuscript of the book is in custody of Russell. The Dallas attorney could not be reached last night for comment, but Oltmans said he was told Russell has the book in his office files. He reportedly has not read the manuscript.

Oltmans went back to Dallas on Feb. 23, 1977, and had lunch with de Mohrenschildt, who was now back at work. The journalist said this exchange took place in the Bishop College library:

De Mohrenschildt: "How would it hit the media if I came out and said I felt responsible for Oswald's behavior?"

Oltmans: "You mean what Oswald did? Shot or not shot, he was involved in the shooting. You have links here to the shooting of the president of the United States."

DE MOHRENSCHILDT: "I realize that and I don't want to incriminate myself directly. But I am convinced that what Oswald finally set up we completely agreed upon."

Oltmans: "But you were in Haiti on the day of the assassination."

De Mohrenschildt: "Yes." Oltmans said de Mohrenschildt "was a guy very cleverly saying 'I knew exactly what Oswald was going to do and I have proof of it.'"

Oltmans said he asked de Mohrenschildt if he was ready to make a statement. He said the professor replied, "Yes, but never in America. I am being followed. I find my house all the time searched. So I am scared to death. I first must get out of the country."

Oltmans said he quickly called his Dutch television superior and was told to bring de Mohrenschildt to Holland. As Oltmans tells it, de Mohrenschildt had several changes of mind but finally said he was ready to go. Oltmans said they drove to Houston, left de Mohrenschildt's car there with a man named David Russell and eventually arrived in Amsterdam on March 3. There they began a round of talks with Dutch television and publishing executives, meanwhile checking with attorney Russell in Dallas to be sure the manuscript was still in his office.

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ON MARCH 5, OLTMANS and de Mohrenschildt drove to Brussels to meet a friend of the Dutch reporter, a Soviet diplomat he identified only as "Kuznetzov." The three men chatted at the newstand of the Hotel Metropole and de Mohrenschildt said he would go for a walk before lunch. "He never returned from that walk," said Oltmans.

On March 7, back in Holland, de Mohrenschildt's disappearance was reported to the U.S. Embassy in the Hague. Oltmans said the official receiving the report was Jacob Gillespie, a press officer at the embassy. There is no record that the missing report was relayed to the State Department in Washington.

Oltmans said he wasn't worried. He got a call from a man in Brussels who identified himself as "Genta," and he said de Mohrenschildt had departed for the United States. But Oltmans said de Mohrenschildt left behind all his belongings except his briefcase — his pipe, his luggage and his dirty raincoat. De Mohrenschildt took Oltmans' clean new raincoat instead. Oltmans said he put all of de Mohrenschildt's possessions in an Amsterdam bank and sent the receipt to attorney Russell in Dallas.

Yesterday in Palm Springs, Fla., a police official said authorities there were also holding "certain personal papers" belonging to de Mohrenschildt, United Press International reported. The official declined to say if those papers were related to the Kennedy assassination.

In early March, Oltmans came to Washington, called the committee about the whole affair and told essentially this story to deputy counsel Robert Tanenbaum and three other investigators. Oltmans' view of de Mohrenschildt's role in the assassination, if there is one, is that de Mohrenschildt didn't figure in the slaying but "that together they cooked it up."

De Mohrenschildt, according to Oltmans, could have been kidnaped, or have had another "crazy attack" or have gone to the Soviet Union. None of those things happened, but Oltmans did have a clue to the way de Mohrenschildt died even before the man shot himself.

Oltmans said "He told me in Europe: 'Look, I'll be discharged at Bishop College in June. I'm 65. My wife ran away. (They reportedly are now divorced.) I'm at the end of the line.' And one day he came into my

room and said, 'Let's face it. I only made up the story (about Oswald) because everybody makes a million dollars off the Kennedy assassination, and I haven't made anything. So now it's my time. So now you and I know that.'"

THE FBI SAYS IT does not know what to make of de Mohrenschildt's strange journey or of his apparent suicide. The Warren Commission concluded that he did not have any connection with Kennedy's death even though he knew the Oswalds well and probably helped them with financial and family problems. Even so, the House committee wanted to question de Mohrenschildt, and Fonzi just missed him.

He went to the house where de Mohrenschildt was staying at noon Tuesday and was told to return that evening because the man was not home. In the afternoon, de Mohrenschildt apparently put a shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

No note was found. If there is an answer to George de Mohrenschildt's troubled life, it may lie in the book he has written and that lawyer Russell purportedly has filed away in Dallas: "I'm a Patsy, I'm a Patsy."

Ray's Report of Bounty Checked

WASHINGTON, March 28 (AP)—The House assassinations committee said today that it was investigating whether James Earl Ray collected a bounty from businessmen or other persons for killing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Mr. Ray has been quoted as saying he intended to collect a bounty for the murder.

In an interim report, the committee also said it was "intensively investigating" a report by a deceased Southern undercover police informant that he had overheard representatives of two organizations discuss killing Dr. King.

The reference apparently was to a report that a Miami police informant said he had overheard two labor leaders discuss such a plan. The committee's report did not identify the individuals.

The report said the panel did not have corroboration for any of the leads sketched out in the document.

In addition, it said it was pursuing leads indicating that Lee Harvey Oswald was associated with anti-Castro groups supported by the Central Intelligence Agency rather than with pro-Castro groups, as widely suspected. The Warren Commission identified Oswald as the lone assassin of President Kennedy.

The committee report quoted an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigations as indicating that Oswald was an F.B.I. informant, contrary to the Warren Commission's conclusion that he was not.

The report said that Mr. Ray told fellow inmates at Missouri state penitentiary before he escaped on April 23, 1967, that he would kill Dr. King "if the price was

right" and that he intended to find a businessmen's association that he had heard had offered \$100,000 for Dr. King's murder.

The report said the question of whether Mr. Ray ever made contact with such a group had never been resolved and added, "The committee intends to resolve it."

The report to the House was released by the committee as it sought House approval to keep the investigations of the Kennedy and King assassinations going for two years. If the House refuses, the committee will die at the end of this month.

Aides Visit Ray in Prison

PETROS, Tenn., March 28 (AP)—Officials of the House assassinations committee met here again today with James Earl Ray, who is serving a 99-year sentence in Brushy Mountain State Prison after confessing to shooting Dr. King in Memphis. Mr. Ray was interviewed by the committee's staff for more than two hours last Tuesday.

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Assassinations Probe Nearing Showdown; Counsel Under Fire

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Rules Committee cleared the way yesterday for a showdown over the House assassinations inquiry amid a sudden outburst of demands for the ouster of chief counsel Richard A. Sprague.

"I think this resolution is in serious trouble on the House floor," Rep. Morgan Murphy (D-Ill.) warned members of the Assassinations Committee at a hearing before the Rules Committee.

Although Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill has promised "wholehearted support" for keeping the investigations alive, Murphy said advocates of the inquiry were seriously underestimating "the feelings of the members of the House" about Sprague.

"I think you ought to get your own man in there," Murphy warned the newly installed Assassinations Committee chairman, Louis Stokes (D-Ohio). "What he can do to Henry, he can do to you."

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), the former chairman whom Murphy was talking about, underscored the mood in a bitter speech on the House floor about how he unsuccessfully tried to fire Sprague last month. He said he was deserted by House Democratic leaders and committee colleagues, and blamed it at least partly on racial discrimination.

"I think I have been treated shabbily," Gonzalez declared. "I think that if my name were Jones or O'Brien or Rosenthal or George Washington Carver or Martin Luther King, I would not have been treated so shabbily."

The Texas Democrat held the floor for more than an hour with a chapter-and-verse recitation of his efforts to restore order to the committee's finances.

The day after he ordered Sprague's dismissal, Gonzalez said, Majority Leader Jim Wright (Tex.) assured him, "Well, fella, we're with you. You're right."

"I don't know how anybody could interpret that," Gonzalez said. "I took it as support." But it soon disappeared when the rest of the committee remained solidly behind Sprague. Gonzalez quit the chairmanship and the committee on March 8.

With heavy sarcasm, Gonzalez at various points imitated the voices of Reps. Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.) and Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.) speaking at a Rules Committee hearing in January, described Rep. Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) as "the great rajah of the Rules Committee," and called Del. Walter E. Fauntroy (D-D.C.) "the vizier of Washington."

The Rules Committee voted 9 to 4 to set up a floor vote Wednesday on continuing the investigations into the murders of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. for the remainder of the 95th Congress. Two other Rules Committee members, Murphy and Rep. John Young (D-Tex.), voted "present."

Appointed chairman March 8, Stokes said he inherited a committee staff that was marking time with "almost no stationery, almost no supplies" and was "unable to travel" or even make a long-distance phone call. He strongly urged keeping the investigations going past their current March 31 expiration date and submitted a 14-page report indicating some of the "leads" the committee is pursuing.

The information, however, smacked of twice-told tales. In one passage reminiscent of former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's celebrated investigation, the committee said it is "actively pursuing several new leads which indicate that Lee Harvey Oswald was associated with CIA-supported anti-Castro groups."

Raising the persistent specter of a "false Oswald," the committee said those same "leads" also "suggest" that Oswald's "reported pro-Castro activities" and his "alleged" trip to Mexico City might have been deliberately designed to mask his CIA-supported anti-Castro associations.

Stokes insisted at yesterday's hearing that the inquiry was running smoothly now with Gonzalez gone. The new chairman maintained that Sprague had satisfactorily countered all the charges against him at a secret committee meeting recently.

Murphy noted that Gonzalez was not present when the questioning of Sprague was conducted. "We're taking Sprague's word over Gonzalez' word, as I understand it," Murphy said. Citing Gonzalez' speech on the House floor earlier in the afternoon, Murphy said he was especially concerned about a charge that Sprague had forbidden committee staffers to furnish payroll information to committee members.

Stokes said that Sprague "has offered a number of times to step aside if it would be of assistance to the committee," but the committee remains solidly behind him.

"I think you ought to accept that offer," Murphy said.

Rep. Joe Moakley (D-Mass.) said he has been supporting the investigation for months, but he agreed that the issue in the minds of most House members is "not whether the assassinations committee ought to be reconstituted. It's whether Mr. Sprague should be retained as chief counsel."

Rep. Bolling, who will serve as floor manager for the Wednesday resolution to keep the committee alive, told a reporter that he thinks the odds still favor its passage, but added: "It's awfully close. It'll probably change three times before Wednesday."

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Subpoena Reported For Gang Figure

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee has secretly subpoenaed crime figure Santo Trafficante Jr. for its first hearing today into the murder of President John F. Kennedy, according to informed sources.

Once the overlord of syndicate gambling in Cuba, Trafficante is the only surviving member of a gangland trio that was secretly enlisted by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1960 in efforts to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

The other two men, described as Mafia members, were Sam (Momo) Giancana, who was shot to death in his suburban Chicago home two years ago, and his longtime lieutenant, Johnny Rosselli, whose decomposed body was found last summer in an oil drum floating in the backwaters of Miami's Biscayne Bay.

Trafficante is expected to protest the compulsory appearance, and has reportedly hired Boston lawyer F. Lee Bailey to represent him.

"You can't blame him when you remember what happened to the other two," one source said.

Giancana, 65, was murdered as he prepared a midnight snack of sausages and spinach on June 19, 1975, shortly after his release from a hospital and on the heels of preliminary efforts by the Senate Intelligence Committee to contact him in its investigation of CIA assassination plots.

Rosselli, who had been involved in several abortive plots against Castro, testified before the Senate committee five days after Giancana was killed. Thirteen months later, on July 28, 1975, he disappeared from his Plantation, Fla., home. His hacked-up body was found 10 days later in a 55-gallon oil drum weighted with heavy chains.

Both slayings remain unsolved. But long before his murder, Rosselli had been privately claiming to his attorney that Castro had become aware of the CIA-sponsored plots against him and "thereafter employed teams of individuals who were dispatched to the United States for the purpose of assassinating Mr. Kennedy."

Initially introduced to his CIA contacts in late 1960 as "Joe," Trafficante was described as someone who would serve as a courier to Cuba and make arrangements there in the plot to kill Castro. Trafficante had lived in Cuba, and he still had a number of associates there even after Castro seized their gambling enterprises in Havana.

Although he did not testify during the Senate Intelligence Committee's 18-month investigation of CIA misdeeds, Trafficante was questioned secretly last fall by Senate committee

investigators in connection with Rosselli's death.

Trafficante reportedly said he dined with Rosselli at a Fort Lauderdale restaurant less than two weeks before Rosselli's disappearance. He was said to have described this and other get-togethers as "friendly social events with no business."

As long ago as March, 1967, Rosselli had expressed his belief in a Cuban connection to the Kennedy assassination to the FBI through his Washington lawyer, Edward P. Morgan. Morgan, in turn, told the FBI that several of his clients who "were on the fringe of the underworld" informed him that Castro "had learned of the plotting against him."

The House Assassinations Committee had been talking of staging a hearing on the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in hopes of keeping that investigation alive at least past March 31, when its current charter expires. The decision to hold a hearing on the JFK assassination apparently reflects new hope within the committee for continuing that inquiry as well.

Committee lawyers have been in contact with an attorney for James Earl Ray, serving a 99-year prison term for King's 1968 murder, but Ray is not expected to make any public appearances soon beyond a nationally televised interview last night on the Columbia Broadcasting System's "Who's Who" (WTOP-TV).

Interviewed by correspondent Dan Rather, Ray denied, as he has before, firing the shot that killed King, and insisted that he was not even in the rooming house across the street from King's motel at the time of the murder.

Asked why he was remaining silent if someone else did it, rather than telling all, Ray said he feared that whatever he said might be turned against him. "I think a lot of people have a sort of a Pollyanna view of the legal system," he said.

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Assassinations Panel Accepts Lower Funding

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee formally jettisoned its \$8.5 million "bare bones" budget yesterday and decided to try to struggle along for the rest of the year at less than half the price.

Anticipating House approval for continuing their investigations into the murders of President Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., after a dubious winter, committee members also voted a new resolution to keep them in business for the remainder of the 95th Congress—until 1978.

Del. Walter E. Fauntroy (D-D.C.) said he thought the proposed new budget of \$2,750,000 for calendar 1977 would be "certainly palatable" to the House. It includes approximately \$250,000 already spent this year while the committee struggled for survival in the face of a series of disappointments.

Committee chief counsel Richard A. Sprague endorsed the new allotment reluctantly. He warned that the cut-back might make it impossible to complete the investigations within the expected two years.

Sprague had contended that his original \$6.5 million budget couldn't be cut at all without compromising the inquiry, and he made plain yesterday that he had no intention of eating those words.

Instead, he said he was relying on the assurances of his two top deputies, Robert Tanenbaum and Robert Lechner, who told him they felt they could conduct effective investigations with the shrunken budget.

"I have gone along with their recommendation," Sprague said. "It is less than I would propose, but I am willing to go ahead."

Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.), chairman of a special budget task force for the committee, said the biggest savings was realized by cutting the proposed staff from 170 to 115 persons, meaning a \$2,334,100 reduction in projected salaries.

The new proposal would provide a 27-member task force, under Tanenbaum's direction, to investigate the Kennedy assassination, and 27 more,

headed by Lechner, to investigate King's murder.

The inquiry would still be the most expensive investigation ever undertaken by Congress, but House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) professed his "wholehearted support" for it this week after a private briefing from the ranking Democrats on the committee.

It was also plain, from the figures presented yesterday, that next year's budget for the committee, with a full-strength staff of 115, will be about \$1 million higher.

The House Rules Committee is expected to take up the resolution reconstituting the committee early next week. The budget will be submitted later, first to the House Administration Committee and then to the House floor.

The Assassinations Committee spent the rest of the day in secret session for a briefing on the progress of the Kennedy and King investigations. Chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) told reporters that it included a rundown on the committee staff's prison interview Tuesday of James Earl Ray, who

is serving a 99-year term in Tennessee for King's murder.

"He was very cooperative," Stokes said of Ray. The chairman, however, indicated that the interview was primarily a get-acquainted session, and said, "It may be necessary to talk to him many times" before considering any public testimony.

U.S. Coast Guard Boards Japanese Fishing Ship

JUNEAU, March 23 (AP)—The U.S. Coast Guard has cited another foreign fishing vessel for apparent violation of the new 200-mile limit law off the Alaskan coast, a spokesman said today.

The Coast Guard spokesman said the Japanese trawler Zuiko Maru was boarded Tuesday night about 180 miles northwest of St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea by the cutter Midgett. The boarding party allegedly found illegal crab and salmon aboard the Japanese vessel, the spokesman said.

ASSASSINATIONS
COMMITTEE

Slaying Panel Cuts Funds, Staff Pleas

By Jeremiah O'Leary

Washington Star Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee today approved a new and reduced budget of \$2,796,650 for the rest of this year and also cut its investigative staff to 115 from the proposed 170.

The unanimous approval of the budget was followed by a similar vote to ask the House to extend the committee's life for the duration of the 95th Congress. The committee's authorization expires March 31, and today's resolution, if approved by the House, would permit the panel to carry on its investigations into the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. until January 1979.

The resolution now goes to the Rules Committee and then to the floor for action. After that, the House Administration Committee must approve the money requested by Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio.

THE MOVE TO REDUCE the budget from the original proposal of \$6.5 million and cut the staff is a setback for Chief Counsel Richard A. Sprague. Sprague told the committee, "this budget was recommended to me by deputy counsels Robert Lehner and Robert Tannenbaum. I am willing to go along at the moment because they feel with this manpower they can get the job done."

But Sprague said the funding and staff was less than he would have proposed. And he indicated that the cutback approved by the committee today means the investigation might have to continue beyond the life of the 95th Congress.

When Rep. Charles Thone, R-Neb., asked "can we do this thorough, careful and professional job under this budget and will it have to continue into further years?" Sprague replied, "Yes, it will take longer now."

Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., who headed the task force that made up the new budget, declared that the committee would be able to show it has done all the cutting that can be done. He said there is nothing more here that can be cut and the committee would strenuously resist any attempt to do so.

THE COMMITTEE voted \$2,796,650 for operations through the end of 1977. This means that a larger budget for the second year of the probe is almost a certainty, members said. They argued that the \$2.7 million figure will be palatable to Congress and is realistic in light of the mood of the House and the fact that three months of the year have already gone by.

The committee then went into executive session to receive a briefing from Sprague and his associates.

It is believed Sprague gave the committee a fill-in on the three-hour interview he had with James Earl Ray, who is serving a life term in prison for the murder of King, yesterday. Jack Kershaw, Ray's attorney, said in Tennessee that the meeting did not produce any surprise information but might help Ray get the new trial he has been seeking.

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20762

JFK King Unit Backed By O'Neill

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Assassinations Committee yesterday won a turnaround promise of "wholehearted support" from House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr.

After a closed-door meeting with the committee's three senior members, O'Neill also told reporters, with apparent approval, that the panel will ask the House for \$2.5 million to carry it through the rest of this year.

The committee has already spent \$250,000 since Jan. 1. As a result, the new budget proposal would presumably mean a two-year battle costing some \$5.5 million—compared with the initial projection of \$1.5 million that caused so much controversy within the House last winter.

O'Neill's endorsement greatly enhances the committee's chances for survival, but the Speaker acknowledged that it still faces considerable opposition.

"They have my wholehearted support," the Speaker said after conferring with Assassinations Committee Chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.) and Del. Walter Fauntroy (D-D.C.). "But there is a lot of work to be done [getting votes] on the floor."

The Speaker's conversion apparently came after a private briefing for him on the information compiled thus far in investigating the murders of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. "They convinced him," an O'Neill aide said tersely.

Members of the House Rules Committee got their own backgrounding in a closed meeting with Assassinations Committee members shortly after noon.

The Assassinations Committee will expire March 31 unless it can win House approval of a new resolution keeping the investigations alive. But before it gets to the House floor, the resolution must first be cleared by the Rules Committee.

Even Rep. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), who has been critical of the inquiry from the start, was hesitant after yesterday's briefing to say he still felt it ought to be squelched. But he made plain that he is still skeptical about the information that was laid out for him and other Rules Committee members yesterday at what amounted to "an informal, clandestine meeting."

He said such an approach had never, to his knowledge, been used with the Rules Committee before, not even during the impeachment proceedings against President Nixon.

"I presume the committee has col-

See INQUIRY, A1, Col. 6

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lected some leads, some information which they're going to use to justify continuing the investigations," Lott said last evening. "Some of them are very far-fetched, very remote, in my opinion, but I am re-evaluating my position."

The Assassinations Committee, Lott pointed out, has at least started to buckle down to work after being bogged down for months in disputes over its budget, its investigating techniques, and finally the unsuccessful effort of erstwhile chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) to fire chief committee counsel Richard A. Sprague.

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Assassination Probe Gets New Push

Stokes Vows to Seek
Extension of Panel

By Jeremiah O'Leary
Washington Star Staff Writer

New House Assassinations Committee Chairman Louis Stokes believes he will be ready next week to seek new authority and funding to extend the probe beyond the March 31 expiration date.

The committee, minus its former chairman, Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tex., received a detailed briefing from Chief Counsel Richard A. Sprague yesterday.

Sprague told the committee before the press was excluded for most of the session that he has uncorroborated evidence indicating other persons may have known in advance that John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were going to be murdered.

Stokes, who is black, discounted speculation that the committee might decide to concentrate on the King slaying while setting the assassination of Kennedy aside.

"THE BRIEFING WE received points toward our pursuing both the King and Kennedy cases with equal fervor," Stokes said.

He also said he is not inclined to hold any public hearing on what Sprague said behind closed doors in yesterday's all-day session. He said it would be better and more responsible to have no public hearing than to air uncorroborated information that might hurt innocent people.

Stokes said he favors seeking authorization and funds — probably beginning next week — simply by telling the House leadership of what direction the committee will take and how much money will be required to do it, then going through the needed steps to bring the question to a floor vote.

Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., is in charge of the task force to calculate a new budget for the committee, probably for one year of operations. The committee is expected to reduce its request from the \$6.5 million originally sought by Sprague to \$2 million to \$3 million.

STOKES ALSO SAID a committee group will meet Atty. Gen. Griffin Bell tomorrow afternoon and ask him to cancel the order that prevents committee investigators from having access to Justice Department and FBI files on the Kennedy and King cases.

Sprague's comment that the staff has uncovered some new information may indicate that the committee intends to subpoena James Earl Ray to testify. Ray, who pleaded guilty to shooting King, was sentenced to life in prison but has never testified in open court. He has recanted his confession and is seeking a new trial. There have been reports that Ray wants to testify before the House committee even though his testimony probably would be self-serving.

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A 10

Thursday, March 10, 1977 THE WASHINGTON POST

Sprague: Staff Has 'Conspiracy' Leads

By George Lardner Jr.

Washington Post Staff Writer

The chief counsel of the House Assassinations Committee said yesterday he has gathered uncorroborated "information" suggesting a conspiracy in the murders of both President Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Struggling to keep their investigation alive, committee members convened yesterday in secret session for a briefing from chief counsel Richard A. Sprague and his aides on the progress of the inquiry so far.

In a short statement before the press and public were excluded, Sprague told the committee that the information compiled to date was a blend of reports from "witnesses who have advised us directly that they have relevant information" and hearsay about "witnesses whom we have been told have information."

As a result, he added in straight-face understatement, "We have been unable to do what I would consider a thorough check of the information we have been advised of."

That said, the former Philadelphia prosecutor continued, "The sum total of the information would be in the nature of evidence indicating that others may have had knowledge of or participated in arranging the assassinations of Dr. King and President Kennedy."

Sprague did not elaborate, but it seemed likely that much of the information originated with the many books and articles written in recent years in attempts to debunk the official findings that there was no credible evidence of a conspiracy in either murder. The committee's 73-member staff has been bogged down by controversy in recent weeks, cut off from classified FBI files and unable to travel or even make long-distance phone calls.

Trying to regain its momentum fol-

lowing the resignation of Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), who had tried to fire Sprague for alleged mismanagement and insubordination, the committee met formally yesterday for the first time under its new chairman, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio).

It has only three more weeks to win a new charter from the House and head off extinction. Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) and other House leaders have predicted that the committee will probably not be continued past March 31 unless it can produce some striking new evidence or, in O'Neill's words, "something of a sensational nature."

The Warren Commission, which investigated the 1963 Kennedy assassination with the resources of the FBI and other government agencies, con-

cluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed the President. Similarly, the FBI concluded that James Earl Ray, now serving a 99-year prison term, was King's lone assassin, although a Justice Department task force recently conceded that the sources of Ray's money "still remain a mystery today."

After Sprague's brief public presentation, the committee voted 8 to 2 to go into secret session. Dissenting were Reps. Charles Thone (R-Nebr.) and Harold E. Ford (D-Tenn.).

Sprague mentioned no names, not even those of Oswald or Ray, but it seemed clear that the "others" he had in mind were in addition to those two men. He also told the committee that there was some information indicating that some unidentified individuals

knew in advance that the Kennedy assassination "was about to occur."

Most of yesterday's session, however, was spent on the King murder. At a lunch-hour briefing, Stokes told reporters that the committee was moving with deliberate caution, but he said there was "a very good possibility that some witnesses" may be called to a public hearing before March 31 in an effort to demonstrate the need for continuing the inquiry.

The new chairman would not discuss the witnesses who might testify, but other sources said two under consideration are Ray's brother, Jerry, and former Memphis police detective Edward E. Redditt, one of two black plainclothesmen assigned to keep King under surveillance before the 1968 murder.

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